United Nations S/2018/518

Security Council

Distr.: General
5 June 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 31 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to inform you that, on 31 May 2018, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees initialled a memorandum of understanding to assist the Government of Myanmar in implementing the arrangement on the return of displaced persons from Rakhine State, signed between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh on 23 November 2017. The United Nations agencies will cooperate with the Government for the repatriation of the displaced persons, who have been duly verified so that they can return voluntarily in safety and in dignity. The memorandum of understanding will be signed shortly.

I also have the honour to bring to your attention that the Government of Myanmar has decided to establish an independent commission of enquiry as part of its national initiative to address reconciliation, peace and stability and development in Rakhine State. The independent commission will investigate the violation of human rights and related issues following the terrorist attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. The commission will consist of three members, including an international personality. It will be assisted by national and international legal and technical experts.

In this connection, I have the honour to enclose herewith the following official announcements of the Government of Myanmar:

1. Press release of the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor, dated 31 May 2018, on the memorandum of understanding on assistance to the repatriation process of displaced persons from Rakhine State (see annex I);

2. Announcement 3/2018 of the Office of the President, dated 31 May 2018, on the establishment of an independent commission of enquiry (see annex II).

I would be most grateful if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated to the members of the Security Council as a document of the Council.

(*Signed*) Hau Do **Suan**

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Annex I to the letter dated 31 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor, press release

Government of Myanmar and United Nations agencies initial memorandum of understanding on assistance to the repatriation process of displaced persons from Rakhine State

31 May 2018

1. On 31st of May 2018, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP) of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initialed the Memorandum of Understanding to assist the government of Myanmar in Implementing the "Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State", signed between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh on 23 November 2017. The UN Agencies will cooperate with the Government for the repatriation of the displaced persons, who have been duly verified so that they can return voluntarily in safety and in dignity.

2. The UNDP and UNHCR have been invited to take part in various stages of return and resettlement, and to support access to livelihoods through the design and implementation of community based intervention.

3. The Government of Myanmar had been discussing the MoU with UNDP and UNHCR since February 2018. The discussions have resulted in the MoU which will be signed soon.

Annex II to the letter dated 31 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Office of the President, Announcement 3/2018

Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar will establish an independent commission of enquiry

31 May 2018

The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has decided to establish an Independent Commission of Enquiry as part of its national initiative to address reconciliation, peace, stability and development in Rakhine. This decision has also taken into consideration the Interim Recommendations of the Advisory Board for the Committee for the Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State. The Independent Commission will investigate the violation of human rights and related issues following the terrorist attacks by ARSA.

The Commission will consist of three members including an international personality. It will be assisted by national and international legal and technical experts.

United Nations S/2018/519

Security Council

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4 June 2018
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Letter dated 31 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for 30 and 31 May 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**

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Annex to the letter dated 31 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (30 May 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported one incident of gunfire in Ladhiqiyah Governorate.

The Turkish representative office has reported one incident of gunfire in Aleppo Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has carried out three humanitarian operations: one in Qantarah al-Shamaliyah, Hama Governorate; one in Khiyarat Dannun, Rif Dimashq Governorate; and one in Halabiyah, Aleppo Governorate. In total, 1,335 food parcels were distributed. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered was 5.7 tons.

In total, 1,823 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,590.06 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 213 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 81,431 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is unchanged — it is still 2,513.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (31 May 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported one incident of gunfire in Ladhiqiyah Governorate.

The Turkish representative office has reported one incident of gunfire in Dar'a Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,823 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,590.06 tons.

The United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent dispatched one humanitarian convoy to Tallbissah in Homs Governorate. The total cargo weight was 160 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 10 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 81,441 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is unchanged — it is still 2,513.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/520

Security Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2018

Original: English

United States of America: draft resolution

The Security Council,

Expressing concern about the escalation of violence in Gaza caused by terrorist organizations such as Hamas,

Recalling also its resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and *emphasizing* the obligation not to attack civilians, civilian populations, or civilian objects in situations of armed conflict,

Deploring the loss of human life and the endangermen t of innocent civilians,

Stressing that all parties must comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, as applicable,

Expressing its grave concern at the escalation of violence and tensions and the deterioration of the situation in Gaza, caused by terrorist organizations such as Hamas, in particular since 30 March 2018,

Condemning all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement and destruction caused by terrorist organizations such as Hamas,

Reaffirming the right to peaceful assembly and protest, freedom of expression and of association,

Alarmed at the exacerbation of the dire humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and *stressing* the need to achieve a sustainable solution to this crisis,

Stressing the particular impact that armed conflict has on women and children, including as refugees and displaced persons, as well as on other civilians who may have specific vulnerabilities, including persons with disabilities and older persons, and stressing the need for the Security Council and Member States to strengthen further the protection of civilians,

Recalling its commitment to a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict agreed upon by both parties,

Reaffirming the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders,

1. *Condemns* in the strongest terms the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian militants in Gaza toward communities in Israel on May 29, 2018, which damaged civilian infrastructure and was the largest attack from Gaza since 2014;

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2. *Demands* that Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other militant groups in Gaza cease all violent activity and provocative actions, including along the boundary fence, and cease putting civilians at risk through their actions;

3. *Condemns* the diversion of resources by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other groups in Gaza to construct military infrastructure, including tunnels to infiltrate Israel and equipment to launch rockets, when such resources could have addressed the needs of the civilian population;

4. *Demands* that all member states refrain from providing weapons or any other materiel that could be used for rocket attacks to militant groups in Gaza;

5. *Calls* for full respect by all parties for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including in regards to the protection of the civilian population, and reiterates the need to take appropriate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians and ensure their protection, as well as to ensure accountability for all violations;

6. *Deplores* any actions by terrorist groups in Gaza such as Hamas that could provoke violence and endanger civilian lives, and *calls on* them to ensure that protests remain peaceful;

7. *Calls* for urgent steps to ensure an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire;

8. *Calls* for the exercise of maximum restraint and calm by all parties in Gaza and the need for immediate and significant steps to stabilize the situation and to reverse negative trends on the ground caused by terrorist organizations in Gaza, including Hamas;

9. *Demands* that all parties in Gaza cooperate with medical and humanitarian personnel to allow and facilitate unimpeded access to the civilian population, *calls* for the cessation of all forms of violence and intimidation directed against medical and humanitarian personnel, and *expresses grave concern* for the destruction of the Kerem Shalom crossing by actors in Gaza, which has severely hindered deliveries of food and fuel for the people of Gaza;

10. *Encourages* tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, including in support of the mediation efforts of Egypt, and concrete steps to reunite the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority and ensure its effective functioning in the Gaza Strip;

11. *Welcomes* and *urges* further engagement by the Secretary-General and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to assist, in cooperation with concerned partners, in the efforts to immediately de-escalate the situation and address urgent infrastructure, humanitarian, and economic development needs, including through the implementation of projects endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee;

12. *Requests* the Secretary-General to examine the present situation and to submit a written report, as soon as possible, but not later than 60 days from the adoption of the present resolution, on terrorist organizations such as Hamas using protesters for incitement and carrying out other acts of violence in the past 90 days, with the goal of preventing such clashes in the future;

13. *Decides* to remain seized of the matter.

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Security Council

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1 June 2018

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 11 June 2015 (S/PRST/2015/12), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in Central Africa since my previous report, dated 28 November 2017 (S/2017/995), and an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA. The report also provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region, pursuant to Council resolution 2349 (2017).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. Central Africa continued to face serious political and security challenges against the backdrop of a regional economic slowdown. There have been some positive developments towards subregional integration, and efforts to consolidate democratic governance.

Political developments and trends

3. On 29 January, the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) held a consultative meeting in Addis Ababa, on the margins of the African Union summit. They agreed to convene a session of the Assembly of Heads of State of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa in February, which was subsequently postponed to a later date yet to be announced. They also decided to hold the seventeenth ordinary session of the Summit of ECCAS Heads of State and Government tentatively in June.

4. The fifth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa took place in Libreville on 3 and 4 March. It was preceded by the nineteenth ordinary session of the Defence and Security Commission of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa from 28 February to 1 March. In its final communiqué, the Council of Ministers, inter alia, strongly condemned the secessionist aspirations in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon and expressed

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its "full support to the Cameroonian authorities"; rejected all external interference in electoral processes in the region and requested the ECCAS secretariat to reinforce support to concerned member States, in collaboration with the African Union; adopted the strategy to prevent and fight terrorism in Central Africa, developed within the framework of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa; instructed the ECCAS secretariat to develop a subregional strategy to fight mercenary activities and transnational organized crime in Central Africa; and decided to convene a regional conference towards the adoption of subregional regulation on pastoralism in Central Africa. The Council of Ministers also decided to launch an institutional, structural and functional reform of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa.

5. On 20 April, a consultative meeting was held between ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Lomé, where it was announced that the two subregional organizations would hold a joint summit on peace, security, radicalization and violent extremism in July 2018.

6. In Angola, President João Lourenço established an Inter-Ministerial Commission on State Reform on 15 February. He also pledged to hold local elections before the 2022 general elections.

7. In Cameroon, the north-west and south-west regions continued to face serious security challenges. Increased attacks against defence and security forces and abductions by suspected separatist armed groups, as well as the Government's heavy military response, resulted in fatalities and injuries. The situation deteriorated following the arrest in Nigeria of 47 alleged separatists, including the self-proclaimed president of the so-called "Ambazonia State", and their subsequent extradition to Cameroon on 26 January. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), those individuals had submitted asylum claims and four had been formally recognized as refugees. They will be tried in a military court under Law no. 2014/028 of 23 December 2014 on counter-terrorism. On 2 March, the Government announced a Cabinet reshuffle and, inter alia, appointed a new Minister of Territorial Administration. The new Minister, who hails from the north-west region, visited the two English-speaking regions and called for a peaceful resolution of the crisis through dialogue. A new Ministry for Decentralization and Rural Development was created.

8. Senatorial elections were held in Cameroon on 25 March, giving a large victory to the ruling party. In addition, preparations continue for presidential, legislative and municipal elections scheduled for 2018.

9. In Chad, social tensions persisted, exacerbated by the decision of the Government to cut the emoluments of civil servants and prompting a general strike by trade unions against austerity measures. The Government and labour unions reached an agreement on 14 March.

10. On 24 December, President Idriss Deby Itno announced a Government reshuffle, reducing the number of ministers from 37 to 24. On 6 April, he announced that legislative elections would be held in November 2018. From 19 to 27 March, the President convened a national forum on institutional reforms in N'Djamena. Most major opposition parties boycotted the forum. The forum recommended, inter alia, an extension of the term of the President and parliamentarians by one year, to six and five years, respectively, both renewable once; the abolishment of the post of Prime Minister; the adoption of a quota granting women 30 per cent of elected offices; and transformation of the electoral management body into a permanent structure. Most recommendations were included in the draft of the new Constitution, which was adopted by the National Assembly on 30 April, in a session boycotted by opposition deputies. On 3 May, the Prime Minister and his Government resigned.

11. In the Republic of the Congo, the Government and a representative of former rebel leader Frédéric Bintsamou, also known as Pastor Ntumi, signed a ceasefire agreement on 23 December. The agreement calls for the launch of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and for the return of internally displaced persons and the restoration of State authority. An ad hoc joint commission, comprising representatives from both sides, was formed to oversee the implementation of the agreement. On 22 January, the joint commission recommended the lifting of the arrest warrant against Pastor Ntumi, the creation of local demobilization centres, the restoration of administrative and judicial authorities, the withdrawal of Government forces, the restoration of State security in the crisis zones and the identification of former combatants. On 7 March, the commission announced the release from detention of five close allies of Pastor Ntumi. At the end of March, the Government shared a roadmap with the United Nations, outlining the steps envisaged for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

12. In Equatorial Guinea, legislative and municipal elections took place in November 2017, with the coalition led by the ruling Partido democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial obtaining all 75 seats in the Senate, all municipal seats, and 99 out of 100 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The opposition Ciudadanos por la Innovación de Guinea Ecuatorial party obtained the remaining seat. Women obtained 20 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 11 in the Senate. The opposition contested the results, denouncing fraud and irregularities. In early February, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo appointed a Cabinet of 25 members, down from 29, as part of austerity measures. On 26 February, the district court of Mongomo ordered the dissolution of the Ciudadanos por la Innovación party, because of its "threats against State security". On 7 May, the Supreme Court confirmed the dissolution of the party.

13. On 28 December, local media reported that an attempt to overthrow President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo was foiled. According to the Government, mercenaries allegedly involved in the attempt to destabilize the country originated from the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, leading to tensions with these countries. Against this background, several high-level visits took place to restore trust. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chad and President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic visited Malabo on 4 and 9 January, respectively, to express solidarity. They denied involvement and offered full cooperation in the investigation. On 25 January, following a meeting in N'Djamena between the Minister of State for Regional Integration of Equatorial Guinea and President Deby Itno, a communiqué was issued stating that Chad had no interest in destabilizing Equatorial Guinea and was working to preserve peace.

14. In Gabon, legislative elections were twice postponed, first to July 2017 and then to the end of April 2018. Except for former presidential candidate and opposition leader Jean Ping, who continued to reject any dialogue with the Government, the main opposition leaders expressed readiness to participate in the polls. On 30 April, the Constitutional Court dissolved the National Assembly and called for the Government to step down for failing to organize legislative elections within the constitutionally mandated timelines. The prerogatives of the National Assembly were temporarily transferred to the Senate. The Court further called on President Ali Bongo Ondimba to appoint a new Government, which would be accountable to the President and would resign as soon as elections took place. On 1 May, the Prime Minister and the Government resigned. The Prime Minister was reconfirmed in his functions by presidential decree on 3 May. A 41-member Government, the third since the conclusion of the national dialogue in May 2017, was sworn in on 7 May.

15. From 13 February to 6 March, President Bongo Ondimba, in his capacity as Chair of ECCAS, visited Angola, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe to discuss regional integration and security.

16. In Sao Tome and Principe, President Evaristo Carvalho promulgated a law creating a Constitutional Court on 27 December. On 3 January, the Supreme Court ruled that some provisions of the bill were unconstitutional. On 9 January, a demonstration was organized by opposition parties in Sao Tome to protest the nomination process for the Court's judges. On 15 January, the National Assembly, dominated by the ruling party, elected the five judges of the Constitutional Court amidst protests by opposition parties and pro-Government demonstrations by the ruling Acção Democrática Independente party, leading to the deployment of the police to control the situation. On 30 January, the judges of the Constitutional Court unanimously elected the Court's president. On 23 February, the National Assembly appointed the members of the National Electoral Commission to prepare for legislative, local and regional elections, scheduled for 2018.

17. The Government of Burundi followed through with its decision to revise the 2005 Constitution. Among other things, the revisions included: extending the presidential term to seven years; providing a five-year period for a possible review of the ethnic quota in all branches of Government; creating the post of Prime Minister and removing the post of Second Vice-President; and requiring a simple majority to pass basic bills in Parliament instead of a two-thirds majority. Many Burundian stakeholders and partners raised concerns that the proposed revisions could reverse the gains by the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. International partners sought to persuade the Government to conclude the inter-Burundian dialogue, led by the East African Community, before the referendum, but to no avail. On 17 May, Burundians went to the polls to approve the amendments to the Constitution, with the participation of one segment of the opposition. Voting reportedly took place in a relatively calm environment.

Security developments and trends

Central African Republic

18. In the Central African Republic, incidents of violence in different parts of the country reflected a fragile security situation. Continued activity by armed groups and criminal networks led to tensions in several regions. In April, a series of clashes occurred in Bangui following a joint operation launched by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and national security forces to forcefully disarm criminal groups controlling neighbourhoods in the capital. The inflammatory rhetoric persisting in Bangui escalated tensions in early May, with continued clashes taking place between security forces and criminal groups. These resulted in casualties among civilians and peacekeepers. Meanwhile, the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation continued. Between February and April, the panel of facilitators of the Initiative completed its second round of consultations with the armed groups.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin

19. Boko Haram remained a threat in the Lake Chad Basin, with suicide bombings, kidnappings, arson attacks, raids and attacks on villages and educational institutions, looting, cattle raiding and ambushes on military positions, as well as the use of sexual violence against civilians. Mass abductions increased over the past months in the region. There were also frequent attacks against schools, with a devastating effect on access to education in the affected areas.

20. From December to April, Boko Haram was responsible for 98 security incidents in Cameroon and Chad. At least 81 civilians were killed in Cameroon, and one in

Chad. There were 10 suicide attacks and attempts in Cameroon during the same period, involving 15 suicide bombers, at least eight of whom were women and at least two children. On the night of 5 to 6 May, six people were reportedly killed, including four local Government officials and a soldier, in an attack by Boko Haram on a Chadian army checkpoint on the island of Gabalami in Lake Chad.

21. The growing use of young women and girls as suicide bombers created an atmosphere of suspicion towards them and made them targets of harassment, stigmatization by the affected communities and arbitrary arrests by security forces. This included the women and girls who managed to escape captivity. Local communities in Cameroon and Chad raised concerns about the reintegration of surrendered Boko Haram fighters.

22. In December, the ministers of defence and heads of security agencies of the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission met in N'Djamena to assess the security situation in the region and plan for future operations against Boko Haram. The Multinational Joint Task Force pursued its military operations against Boko Haram, while engaging in advocacy efforts along with Commission to promote a humanitarian response and address long-term development needs. The African Union and the Commission, with the support of various United Nations entities, held a conference to develop a coordinated regional approach to screen, prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate persons associated with Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, in line with Security Council resolution 2349 (2017), in N'Djamena from 10 to 13 April. This was a follow-up to the first Regional Stabilization Conference for the Lake Chad Region, held in N'Djaména from 2 to 4 November 2017, with the overall aim of developing a regional stabilization strategy for the Lake Chad region. The conference outlined six main pillars for the regional strategy, which is expected to be finalized in June: (a) disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; (b) the resettlement of internally displaced persons; (c) the enhancement of local capacities in resilience; (d) the socioeconomic revitalization of the region; (e) preventing violent extremism; and (f) education.

Lord's Resistance Army

23. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to pose security risks to civilians in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its attacks consisted of ambushes, lootings, abductions, sexual violence, poaching and killings. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, two civilians were killed. Incidents were concentrated in the Bangadi area of Dungu territory, the Banda area of Ango territory and Nambia locality in Niangara territory. Two LRA fighters surrendered with their weapons during the reporting period.

24. Between 1 November 2017 and 17 April, 32 LRA attacks allegedly took place in the Central African Republic, resulting in three deaths and 79 abductions. Most of the abductees were released within a short period. Most of the incidents took place in Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures. As part of its protection of civilians mandate, on 1 April, a joint patrol of MINUSCA and the Central African Armed Forces rescued 15 people who had been abducted by LRA during an attack against Koubou village, Haut-Mbomou prefecture.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

25. The fourth ordinary session of the conference of Heads of State and Government of the Gulf of Guinea Commission took place on 23 November in Abuja. The meeting approved a strategy to revitalize and improve the functioning of the Commission, as well as the accession of Ghana to the treaty establishing the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

26. At its fifth ordinary ministerial session, held in Libreville on 3 and 4 March, the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa requested the President of the Council of Ministers of ECCAS to convene a meeting of ministers in charge of maritime affairs and finance to discuss the financing of the maritime security and safety architecture.

Poaching and illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources

27. On 11 December, the European Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime signed an agreement in Libreville to address wildlife and forest crime, as well as the illicit trafficking of natural resources in Central Africa. The agreement aims at strengthening the national and regional capacities of law enforcement officers, prosecutors and the judiciary in ECCAS member States.

B. Humanitarian developments

28. As at 26 April, the situation in Burundi remained precarious, with 3.6 million people in need of assistance throughout the country and over 430,478 Burundian refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Based on a tripartite agreement between Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR, almost 21,500 Burundian refugees were voluntarily repatriated from the United Republic of Tanzania between September 2017 and 5 April.

29. Political unrest and violence in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon resulted in the forced displacement of nearly 21,291 Cameroonians to Nigeria between October 2017 and the end of April. The rise in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Cameroon resulted in a surge in humanitarian needs for both the displaced populations and vulnerable host communities. Cameroon hosted 255,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the eastern regions as of April. Due to population displacement, food insecurity and epidemics, 3.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance, for which $304.5 million was requested in 2018.

30. In the Central African Republic, the overall number of internally displaced persons increased by 70 per cent in the past year, reaching over 680,000. The number of refugees also increased by 30 per cent in the same period, reaching almost 570,000. Worsening security had a negative impact on humanitarian access. Threats and acts of violence against non-governmental organizations led humanitarian partners to review their presence in some areas. Moreover, engagement with parties to the conflict was becoming increasingly difficult due to the increased fragmentation of armed groups. Humanitarian operations were hindered by lack of funding.

31. As at 30 April, Chad hosted 449,490 refugees, mainly from the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the Sudan. Approximately 30,000 new refugees fled to southern Chad following a surge in violence in north-west Central African Republic at the end of December. Chad was also striving to address growing food insecurity, malnutrition and health emergencies that had left 4.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including around 4 million who were food insecure. The required humanitarian response for 2018 was estimated at $544 million.

32. The improving security situation in the Pool region of the Republic of the Congo will facilitate the return of internally displaced persons and the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the country. With almost 160,000 people affected, significant humanitarian challenges remained. The country hosted 31,688 refugees from the Central African Republic and 15,654 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo as at 30 April.

33. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was facing its worst cholera outbreak in 15 years. Moreover, on 8 May, the Government declared an outbreak of Ebola virus disease in Equateur Province — the ninth outbreak in the country since the disease was first discovered in 1976 — with 51 cases reported as at 22 May. For 2018, aid organizations requested $1.68 billion to assist some 10.5 million people, more than twice the $812.6 million requested in 2017. The needs for almost 807,000 Congolese refugees in the top eight recipient countries amounted to $504 million, while a separate Ebola response plan amounts to $57 million for a three-month period.

34. Due to funding shortfalls, the World Food Programme reduced its food and cash assistance to more than 140,000 refugees in Rwanda. This was seen by humanitarian actors and the Government of Rwanda as a catalyst for refugees from Kiziba camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to start protests and a sit-in in February, leading to the death of 11 refugees when security forces intervened to end the protests. UNHCR deplored the disproportionate use of force by the police and called on the Rwandan authorities to refrain from further use of force and to investigate the circumstances of the incidents.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin

35. The Boko Haram conflict continued to fuel a humanitarian crisis, with 10.7 million people in need of life-saving assistance in the affected regions of Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. As at 30 April, some 211,516 Nigerian refugees were registered in the Lake Chad Basin, including 93,114 in Cameroon and 9,932 in Chad. Approximately 2.1 million people were internally displaced. Across the affected region, $1.6 billion was required in 2018 for humanitarian assistance, including $189.1 million for Cameroon and $179.4 million for Chad. Across the Lake Chad Basin, the number of food insecure people was expected to rise to 5.7 million during the lean season starting in June.

36. By end of April, Cameroon hosted some 93,100 Nigerian refugees in the Far North region, where the protection of civilians and gender-based violence remained of great concern. While voluntary returns to Nigeria from Cameroon took place during the reporting period, incidents of forced returns continued to be reported in the second half of 2017 and the first quarter of 2018, although in fewer numbers than earlier in 2017. In Chad, Boko Haram activities impeded trade with Nigeria and Cameroon, affecting in particular the Chadian herders who would previously cross the border with Nigeria to sell their livestock.

C. Human rights trends

37. Reports of alleged serious human rights violations and abuses, notably killings, forced disappearances, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, detentions and restrictions on the freedoms of association, expression and movement continued in Burundi. The ongoing political impasse, increased unemployment and rising prices of basic commodities and services had a devastating impact on the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. The Imbonerakure continued to act as law enforcement agents. The Government of Burundi and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) pursued their discussion to resume cooperation suspended since October 2016.

38. In Cameroon, there were continued reports of alleged human rights violations in the English-speaking regions and the areas affected by Boko Haram, including the killing of members of the defence and security forces, local authorities and civilians, abductions, excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests by security forces, and restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, and the right to free trial. The

forced return of 47 Cameroonians from Nigeria in late January, the majority of whom had lodged asylum claims in Nigeria, and the unknown status of their conditions and whereabouts, have raised concern about a possible breach of international human rights and refugee instruments ratified by Cameroon and Nigeria.

39. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA documented verified incidents of violations or abuses of human rights, including targeted attacks against civilians along religious and ethnic lines.

40. In Chad, restrictions were placed on citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, including a prohibition on demonstrations for security reasons. On 6 February, 50 people were arrested during a public demonstration organized by the opposition to protest austerity measures. Following their trial, 16 were released on procedural grounds and 34 sentenced to imprisonment for four months by the high court of N'Djamena. On 6 February, the Government suspended the activities of 10 political parties accused of "incitement to violence" and disruption of public order for two months. The suspension was lifted on 17 February for five of the parties that had lodged an appeal.

41. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, civilians in conflict-affected areas continued to be at risk of serious human rights violations, including killings and sexual violence. Interethnic and intercommunity violence resurfaced in some areas, notably in Ituri province. The conflicts created conditions conducive to sexual violence. There was also violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Kinshasa and other cities.

42. In the Republic of the Congo, some opposition and human rights organizations expressed concern about the non-inclusion of reparations provisions in the December 2017 ceasefire agreement for the victims of the crisis in the Pool region. The Government accepted an offer by OHCHR to assist in the establishment of a national commission of inquiry into the allegations of human rights violations committed in the country since 2015, including those related to the Pool crisis and incidents surrounding the referendum on the Constitution in 2015. On 11 May, former presidential candidate Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

43. In Equatorial Guinea, a supporter of the opposition Ciudadanos por la Innovación de Guinea Ecuatorial party died in custody on 14 January as a result of "torture and ill treatment", according to the party. The Government refuted the accusation. On 26 February, as part of its order on dissolving the party (see para. 12 above), the district court of Mongomo sentenced 21 of its members to more than 30 years in prison and heavy individual fines. This, too, was upheld by the Supreme Court. Those sentenced were part of a group of 147 arrested during separate security incidents following the legislative elections of November 2017. They were accused of sedition, public disorder, abuse of authority, serious injury and conspiracy against the State. The other arrested members were released.

44. In Gabon, opposition parties and civil society organizations denounced illegal arrests and prolonged detention, torture, ill-treatment and disappearances of opposition members and frequent travel bans imposed on opposition leaders. The European Union requested an international investigation into the post-electoral violence in 2016 during its intensified dialogue with the Government in October 2017, resulting in the halting of dialogue to date.

45. In Rwanda, in early 2018 the Parliament adopted a new penal code removing solitary confinement as a punishment for crimes and lessening certain provisions related to defamation. However, the new code still contained provisions that had reportedly been used to oppress and silence political opponents.

D. Socioeconomic trends

46. The socioeconomic context was marked by social tension and strike actions, including against austerity measures adopted by governments in several countries to tackle the consequences of falling oil prices. Forecasts by the Bank of Central African States indicated a slight increase in the prices of the main export products in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) space, including oil, compared with 2017. In addition, Chad and the Republic of the Congo were expected to increase their oil production. Chad was also forecasted to accelerate activities in non-oil sectors, along with Cameroon and Gabon. Economic growth in CEMAC was expected to rise to 1.7 per cent in 2018, compared to a decrease of 0.2 in 2017. The CEMAC budget for 2018 would enable the institution to implement key projects in transportation infrastructure and complete its institutional reforms programme. To date, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and Gabon had signed new economic agreements with the International Monetary Fund.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and prevention

Angola

47. From 7 to 9 February, my Special Representative travelled to Luanda, and met President Lourenço and the Minister of External Relations. They discussed the reform of ECCAS and the country's role in conflict prevention in the subregion.

Cameroon

48. My Special Representative travelled to Cameroon from 24 February to 4 March to assess the situation in the country. He reiterated the call for genuine dialogue to find lasting solutions to the crisis in the north-west and south-west regions and expressed the readiness of the United Nations to support national decentralization efforts within the framework of the Constitution. Several UNOCA working-level visits were undertaken in November 2017 to provide support to the Resident Coordinator's office. The Department of Political Affairs, United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations country team continued to work closely with the Cameroonian electoral management body to develop targeted activities, in line with the recommendations of the electoral needs assessment mission of July 2017.

49. The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon visited the English-speaking regions on 7 and 8 February to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground, jointly with UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Government. The mission focused on information-gathering on potential humanitarian needs and population movements and identifying options for delivering humanitarian assistance. On 22 February, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator and the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations visited Cameroon.

Central African Republic

50. From 15 to 18 March, my Special Representative and the Secretary-General of ECCAS undertook a joint visit to the Central African Republic to reiterate United Nations and ECCAS support to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation.

They met with President Touadera and welcomed the decision by the Government to reactivate the joint commissions between the Central African Republic and Cameroon, as well as Chad and the Sudan to address regional security concerns. In a joint communiqué issued on 17 March, the two officials reiterated their determination to continue to support the panel of facilitators of the African Initiative and to contribute to the development of the country, in close coordination with my Special Representative for the Central African Republic. From 10 to 13 April, my Special Representative returned to Bangui to participate in the meeting of the International Support Group. He also visited the country from 13 to 16 May to engage with national authorities, MINUSCA and other stakeholders on the deteriorating situation. UNOCA dispatched a working-level team from 7 to 14 February, in the context of the implementation of the African Initiative.

Chad

51. My Special Representative travelled to Chad from 14 to 18 January, 11 to 14 March and 17 to 19 April for consultations with the Government and other national stakeholders, to promote an inclusive political dialogue. During his meeting with President Deby Itno on 18 April, he called for the swift establishment of the standing framework for political dialogue, as recommended by the national forum on institutional reforms.

52. From 9 to 13 April, UNOCA and the Peacebuilding Support Office participated in a programming support mission to Chad to identify priority opportunities for consideration by the Peacebuilding Fund. UNOCA also took part in a United Nations electoral needs assessment mission to Chad, led by the Department of Political Affairs, from 12 to 23 February.

Equatorial Guinea

53. My Special Representative visited Equatorial Guinea from 8 to 10 January to meet with President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo after the foiled coup attempt of 28 December. He condemned any attempted change of Government by unconstitutional means and dispatched a working-level team to Malabo, from 22 to 26 January, to assess the political and human rights situation.

Gabon

54. My Special Representative continued to engage with political actors to encourage their participation in the upcoming legislative elections and their contribution to democratic governance. He also encouraged the Government to ensure adequate communication with all political actors in preparing for the elections.

Republic of the Congo

55. My Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville from 10 to 14 January, following the signing of the December 2017 ceasefire agreement. He met with President Denis Sassou Nguesso and other stakeholders to encourage continued efforts towards achieving lasting peace in the Pool region. He further emphasized that a comprehensive peace agreement, including a political framework, was crucial to ensure an environment conducive to a successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. UNOCA dispatched a working-level team to Brazzaville and Kinkala, from 10 to 17 February, to consult all stakeholders in joint efforts with the United Nations country team to develop a gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and dialogue project proposal for possible funding by the Peacebuilding Fund. At the request of the Government, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations led a technical assessment mission to Brazzaville from

22 January to 4 February to support the national authorities and the United Nations country team in developing a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy. The Department of Political Affairs deployed a member of its standby team of senior mediation experts to provide further technical support from 3 to 16 March.

Sao Tome and Principe

56. From 21 to 25 January, my Special Representative travelled to Sao Tome and Principe to defuse tensions stemming from the appointment of the members of the newly established Constitutional Court and facilitate dialogue between the Government and opposition parties. He met with President Carvalho, Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada and other senior Government officials, political parties, civil society representatives and international partners.

57. From 13 to 16 March, UNOCA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) co-organized, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Sao Tome and Principe, a training workshop for media professionals in Sao Tome.

B. Support to United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

58. In its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA facilitated the organization of the forty-fifth ministerial meeting in Kigali, from 4 to 8 December. The Committee dedicated a closed-door meeting to the situation in the Central African Republic and trans-border security challenges and affirmed its full support for the reform of Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa. A communiqué prepared by a youth forum in Libreville from 30 November to 2 December, called upon States and regional organizations to take into account the priorities of the youth and ensure their participation in security and development initiatives. The forty-sixth meeting of the Committee was scheduled in Brazzaville from 29 May to 1 June.

59. From 17 to 19 April, UNOCA organized a visit by representatives of the Bureau of the Committee to Brazzaville and the Pool region in the Republic of the Congo to assess recent security developments and discuss the situation with relevant authorities. The findings of the mission would be presented at the forty-sixth ministerial meeting of the Committee.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

60. My Special Representative held regular meetings with the Secretary-General of ECCAS to discuss the political and security situation in the subregion and coordinate their respective approaches in addressing a number of issues. They agreed to conduct joint visits to ECCAS member States to support peace and security efforts. The joint visit to the Central African Republic mentioned in paragraph 50 above was the first in a series of visits planned for 2018. On 12 May, they held a consultative and planning meeting in Libreville, on the sidelines of a joint working-level retreat between the two institutions, and adopted a joint biennial programme for 2018–2019.

61. My Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel attended the consultation meeting between ECCAS and ECOWAS, mentioned in para. 5 above. UNOCA also participated in the opening and closing ceremonies of the

Council of Ministers of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa mentioned in paragraph 4 above.

62. From 16 to 20 April, UNOCA and ECCAS conducted a joint train-the-trainer session on terrorism, cybercrime, money laundering, drugs and narcotics for 31 Gabonese police officers in Libreville.

63. On 23 and 24 May, gender experts from Central Africa will validate the regional action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) at a two-day workshop co-organized by UNOCA and ECCAS in Brazzaville. The plan identifies priority actions on women, peace and security in the subregion.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin

64. My Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel, supported by the respective United Nations country teams, continued to support advocacy efforts for the development of a joint regional strategy to address the root causes of the Lake Chad Basin crisis through regular contacts with regional leaders. In that regard, UNOCA and UNOWAS participated in the first Regional Stabilization Conference for the Lake Chad Region and the follow-up regional conference in N'Djamena, mentioned in paragraph 22 above.

65. From 14 to 16 February, a UNOCA working-level team participated in a regional seminar in Maroua, in the Far North region of Cameroon, on the reintegration of surrendered Boko Haram fighters. In line with its action plan against Boko Haram, UNOCA deployed a working-level team to N'Djamena on 15 and 16 March to set up a cooperation framework with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force, and to establish a platform to exchange views with national and subregional stakeholders and conduct joint analysis on Boko Haram. The team also reached out to the Chadian centre for strategic studies and prospective analysis and the Centre for Studies for the Development and Prevention of Violent Extremism. UNOCA contacted other regional research institutions working on radicalization and violent extremism across the Boko Haram affected countries, to share their research findings and develop sustainable solutions.

Regional integration

66. At its second meeting, held in Libreville on 5 and 6 February, the steering committee in charge of the ECCAS institutional reform selected the research team to work on the technical aspects of the reform, following a public tender. During his policy address to the CEMAC Parliament in Malabo on 2 March, the President of the CEMAC Commission emphasized the importance of the ECCAS/CEMAC rationalization process. He also underscored that one of his priorities would be to implement key measures in support of the free movement of persons and goods policy and to secure the external borders of CEMAC. On 19 February, Chadian President Deby Itno, in his capacity as CEMAC Chairperson, announced the temporary relocation of CEMAC headquarters from Bangui to Malabo.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

67. From 10 to 17 February, UNOCA deployed a working-level team to Yaoundé to assist the Interregional Coordination Centre for Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea to finalize its resource mobilization strategy documents. My Special Representative met with the Executive Director of the Centre on 2 March to discuss the operationalization of the Centre and resource mobilization challenges.

68. On 5 April, my Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel participated in the annual meeting of the Heads of ECCAS, ECOWAS and

the Gulf of Guinea Commission in Yaoundé. Participants discussed the implementation of the regional strategy on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

69. In keeping with the recommendation made by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, the Council of Ministers of Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa adopted the strategy to prevent and fight terrorism in Central Africa, as mentioned in paragraph 4 above. The strategy awaits endorsement by the Summit of ECCAS Heads of State and Government.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army[1]

70. From 17 to 26 February, UNOCA and the African Union conducted a joint visit to Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to assess the LRA threat and the effectiveness of counter-LRA operations and protection of civilians. The mission assessed that livelihood activities away from town centres had stopped and critical humanitarian challenges remained, underscoring a need to strengthen the military response from the African Union Regional Task Force and mobilize funds to support rehabilitation and stabilization initiatives in the LRA-affected zones. Within the framework of Operation Red Kite, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to carry out joint operations in affected areas with limited resources.

71. On 28 and 29 March, in cooperation with African Union, UNOCA organized the second workshop for sector commanders of the African Union Regional Task Force in Addis Ababa to promote coordination between the sector commanders of the Central African Armed Forces in Obo, Central African Republic, and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Dungu. Participants agreed on common practices in repatriating LRA defectors to their countries of origin in line with the standard operating procedures signed by the LRA-affected countries.

72. MONUSCO continued to encourage LRA elements to surrender and played a key role in the repatriation of LRA defectors, with the support of international partners. Fourteen people surrendered, including two LRA fighters awaiting their repatriation to Uganda, at FARDC headquarters. Nine escapees were repatriated and three other victims were awaiting repatriation from Dungu.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

73. My Special Representative participated in the 32nd high-level meeting of Heads of United Nations missions in West Africa, held in Bamako on 5 March.

74. On 29 March, my Special Representative met with the Director-General of UNESCO in Libreville to discuss the effective implementation of the three-year regional programme, jointly developed by UNOCA, UNESCO and ECCAS, with the support of the International Organization of La Francophonie, on strengthening the

[1] See S/2012/481.

capacity of youth in managing an early warning system to promote peace and security in Central Africa.

75. On 10 and 11 April, UNOCA and UNOWAS organized an experience-sharing meeting in Libreville on conflict analysis and pastoralism. Among other things, participants from UN and ECCAS agreed on carrying out joint UNOCA-ECCAS conflict analyses in 2018 and on UN system support to ECCAS to implement its decision on convening a regional conference towards the adoption of subregional regulation on pastoralism in Central Africa, as indicated in paragraph 4 above.

76. On 26 and 27 April, UNOCA hosted the sixth annual meeting of the heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, comprising special envoys and representatives of the Secretary-General, resident coordinators and regional directors of United Nations entities. The meeting explored ways of improving coordination and creating synergies to achieve peace, stability and prosperity in the subregion by focusing on political dialogue and agreements in Central Africa.

IV. Mandate renewal of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

77. Based on the outcome of the strategic review of UNOCA, led by the Department of Political Affairs in 2015, the mandate of the Office was re-focused (see S/2015/554 and S/2015/555). UNOCA made noticeable contributions to conflict prevention and management through the good offices of my Special Representative. It was instrumental in preventing or mitigating election-related crises and promoting inclusive political dialogue and reform processes in Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo and Sao Tome and Principe. UNOCA remained engaged on the crisis in the Central African Republic and promoted bilateral cooperation with the country's neighbours, while encouraging coherence among international and regional actors. My Special Representative continued to mobilize regional support for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the country.

78. UNOCA bolstered cooperation with regional and subregional organizations on peace and security, in particular the African Union, ECCAS, CEMAC and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. The cooperation framework between UNOCA and the ECCAS secretariat, signed in June 2016, was central to improving joint or coordinated approaches between both entities in preventive diplomacy, early warning, mediation, gender mainstreaming and capacity-building, among others. The Office remained engaged with ECCAS and CEMAC in support of regional integration and institutional reforms to rationalize both institutions. Through enhanced collaboration, UNOCA and UNOWAS provided strategic support for regional and subregional initiatives to promote maritime security and address the Lake Chad Basin crisis. UNOCA continued to support regional efforts to counter LRA. It collaborated with ECCAS and the African Union Commission to enhance early warning in Central Africa. UNOCA further ensured coherence and coordination in the activities of United Nations entities in Central Africa on peace and security. UNOCA continued to serve as the Secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

79. Going forward, UNOCA will assist the countries of the subregion in consolidating peace and resolving lingering tensions from the various elections that took place in the period from 2015 to 2018. One of the main priorities of UNOCA for the upcoming mandate period will be to work with ECCAS and its member States towards laying the groundwork for the structural prevention of election-related violence. UNOCA will continue to conduct joint assessments and visits with ECCAS and to enhance the capacities of the ECCAS secretariat in conflict prevention, early

warning, women and peace and security, mediation and other areas. UNOCA will also work closely with UNOWAS on addressing transregional issues such as Boko Haram, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and transhumance.

V. Observations and recommendations

80. Recent developments in Central Africa highlight the volatile and fast-evolving nature of the political, security and social situation in the subregion. Tensions linked to contested electoral processes, as well as social and economic difficulties continued. I welcome efforts by concerned States in the region to undertake reforms to address mounting challenges and to promote democratic governance. Such reform processes should be inclusive and allow for differences to be resolved peacefully. I encourage Member States to uphold their commitments under international human rights instruments by, inter alia, strengthening human rights institutions at the national and regional levels and cooperating actively with relevant international mechanisms.

81. I am encouraged by the adoption by ECCAS of a strategy to prevent and fight terrorism in Central Africa. Practical arrangements and resource mobilization will be essential in implementing the strategy. I also welcome the decision to undertake a comprehensive reform of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, especially to enhance regional solidarity and improve governance. To strengthen the capacities of the subregion for conflict prevention and management, the reform of the Council should be aligned with the ongoing rationalization of CEMAC and ECCAS, which I commend for their sustained commitment to advance their respective reform processes. I also welcome the announcement that ECCAS and ECOWAS will hold a joint summit in July 2018. The United Nations system stands ready to support those efforts.

82. I am heartened by regional efforts, supported by international partners, in the fight against Boko Haram and commend the countries of the Lake Chad Basin for their active engagement in this regard. At the same time, I am appalled by the continuing threat of Boko Haram and other armed groups, serious human rights violations and the dire humanitarian situation in the affected countries. It is vital for the Multinational Joint Task Force to receive further support. The United Nations remains committed to helping mobilize additional international support for this endeavour in close cooperation with the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. I also urge regional, international and bilateral partners to provide support for the implementation of the stabilization, recovery and resilience strategy for the Lake Chad Basin, in line with Security Council resolution 2349 (2017). I exhort Member States to contribute to the relevant humanitarian appeals and deliver on their pledges. My Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel will continue their efforts, in close cooperation with ECCAS, ECOWAS, the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, to ensure that all relevant strategies are mutually reinforcing and effectively address the root causes of the crisis while integrating human rights and gender dimensions.

83. I take note of the planned elections in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe in 2018. I urge the Governments concerned to work towards the conduct of timely, inclusive, credible and peaceful electoral processes and to ensure an increased participation by and representation of women.

84. I am concerned by the growing number of attacks in the English-speaking regions in Cameroon, resulting in a deterioration of the security situation and the disruption of public services, particularly in the education sector. I hope that the new Cabinet, announced on 2 March, will take immediate and concrete steps towards

devising long-term solutions to address the grievances, including by establishing an open and inclusive dialogue and advancing on the decentralization agenda to devise long-term solutions to address grievances and prevent further violence.

85. I remain concerned by continued insecurity across the Central African Republic, including violence against civilians and attacks against United Nations peacekeepers and aid workers. At the same time, I am encouraged by progress achieved by the Government in the restoration of State authority and the continued resolve of the international community to support the authorities in these efforts. The first meeting of the International Support Group reflected this continued international commitment. As the work of the panel of facilitators of the African Initiative proceeds, we must continue to remind the Government and all stakeholders that a political resolution of the crisis is the only avenue for sustainable peace. My Special Representatives for the Central African Republic and for Central Africa will continue to consult with neighbouring States and regional and subregional organizations to promote increased and coherent engagement with the Central African Republic, with a specific focus on the operationalization of bilateral joint commissions.

86. I am troubled by the persistent activities of LRA, which target civilians and undermine security in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, further impeding development in the affected areas. I call upon the African Union and troop-contributing countries to make the necessary arrangements for the reconfiguration of the African Union Regional Task Force. Overall efforts should remain focused on addressing the root causes of LRA.

87. I am encouraged by the active engagement of member States of ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to advance the implementation of the regional strategy on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea. UNOCA and UNOWAS will continue to work with ECCAS and ECOWAS to provide support for the full operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea.

88. I remain concerned by the growing threat of mercenary activities linked with transnational organized crime and the link between transhumance and armed conflict. I commend ECCAS for committing to developing a subregional strategy to fight mercenary activities and transnational organized crime and to holding a regional conference towards the adoption of subregional regulation on pastoralism. The United Nations stands ready to support these efforts in cooperation with other partners.

89. Over the past three years, 10 of the 11 countries in Central Africa conducted or have been preparing for elections. Most of the electoral processes were marred with tension before, during or after the polls. The timely intervention and persistent good offices of my Special Representative have, on most occasions, helped to prevent tensions from escalating out of control. UNOCA has therefore continued to serve as an important and effective tool for preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention in Central Africa. The strategic review conducted in 2015 recognized the role of UNOCA in this regard. One key lesson learned from those electoral processes was that preventing election-related violence also required addressing the structural causes of such violence by working ahead of electoral cycles to build the trust of all stakeholders in the process, establish a consensual legal and institutional framework, and put in place adequate mechanisms for the resolution of legal and political disputes. A key priority for UNOCA for the next mandate will be to work with ECCAS and its member States towards laying the groundwork for the structural prevention of election-related violence. Of note, elections at various levels are planned in all 11 countries in Central Africa over the next three years.

90. Furthermore, the complex nature of ongoing conflicts in the subregion, the emergence of new threats to peace and security and outstanding challenges require a

sustained and more coordinated and coherent support from the United Nations and the international community. As ECCAS and CEMAC pursue their efforts to implement institutional reforms, mobilizing the necessary political, technical and financial support should remain a major priority. The convening of regular tripartite meetings between UNOCA, ECCAS and CEMAC will be a useful tool in this process. The growing transregional threats also necessitate strengthened cooperation between ECCAS and ECOWAS, and between UNOCA and UNOWAS.

91. In view of the above, I recommend that the mandate of UNOCA be extended for another three years, from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2021.

92. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the region, ECCAS, CEMAC, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force, the African Union Regional Task Force and their troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support to UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support to and cooperation with UNOCA.

93. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, François Louncény Fall, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.

United Nations S/2018/522

Security Council

Distr.: General
6 June 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you the attached letter (see annex), which I sent to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, yesterday and which details the United Kingdom's contribution in response to Syria. I should be most grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Karen **Pierce**

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Annex to the letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I promised to write with details of the United Kingdom's contribution in response to the Syria crisis.

Since the conflict in Syria began, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of the international response. We are the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in Syria since 2011.

At the second Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held on 24 and 25 April, the United Kingdom pledged £450 million for the Syria crisis in 2018, with a further £300 million commitment for 2019. This brings the United Kingdom's overall commitment to £2.71 billion in response to the Syria crisis since 2012, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis.

This figure includes £2.3 billion allocated to over 30 implementing partners (including United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross) and is helping to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable people in Syria and of refugees in the region. It also includes allocations made under the United Kingdom Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to support local capacity and build stability in the region. Our support is reaching millions of people and has saved lives in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

Of the £2.3 billion United Kingdom allocation to meet immediate needs, 39 per cent (£910 million) goes to help meet the needs of the most vulnerable people inside Syria. Half of this £910 million is allocated for cross-border assistance. Sixty-one per cent of the £2.3 billion is allocated to support refugees and their host communities in neighbouring countries, including £580 million for Lebanon; £483 million for Jordan; £319 million for Turkey; £19 million for Iraq and £2 million for Egypt.

Our support to Syria and the region since 2012 has provided humanitarian assistance to 17 million people, including over 27,000,000 monthly food rations and over 10,000,000 vaccines. Between April 2016 and March 2017 alone, our support provided almost 5 million people inside Syria with access to clean water, enabled humanitarian agencies to carry out over 3.5 million sanitation and hygiene activities and provided over 700,000 children with formal education.

The United Kingdom firmly believes that while we work towards a political solution that can end the conflict, we must not give up on helping those affected by it. In this spirit, the United Kingdom Secretary of State for International Development called upon those present at the Brussels Conference to join the United Kingdom in calling for concrete actions to enable greater protection for civilians and aid workers now. That means an immediate ceasefire and immediate safe access so that aid workers and medical staff can do their jobs and help the most vulnerable and the most desperate without fear of attack.

The United Kingdom is a global leader within the Syria response. I am proud that at the Brussels Conference we demonstrated clearly that we will continue to lead the response in working with others to call out atrocities, demand access for aid and the protection of civilians and, ultimately, work towards a solution that can put Syria on a path to peace.

(*Signed*) Karen **Pierce**

United Nations S/2018/523

Security Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the fifty-sixth monthly report of the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) (see annex). The report covers the period from 24 April to 23 May 2018.

Arrangements are continuing with regard to the planned destruction of the remaining two chemical weapons production facilities, of the 27 declared in total. The destruction operations themselves will then take a further two to three months, assuming that security conditions permit.

I note that the open issues relating to the declaration and further submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic remain unresolved, notwithstanding the fact that information received by OPCW from the Syrian Arab Republic has partially addressed some of the questions raised. I further note that OPCW is awaiting a response from the Syrian Arab Republic to the letter from the Director General of 10 April 2018. I strongly urge the Syrian Arab Republic to extend its full cooperation to OPCW in resolving these issues, without which the international community cannot be fully confident in the complete elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

With regard to the OPCW fact-finding mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Duma (eastern Ghutah) on 7 April 2018, a team was deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period to visit the relevant sites. In addition, the OPCW Technical Secretariat issued a report of the fact-finding mission on an incident alleged to have taken place in Saraqib on 4 February 2018. In that report, which was transmitted to me and circulated to the Security Council (S/2018/478, enclosure), the fact-finding mission found that chlorine had likely been used as a chemical weapon in the incident.

I express my confidence in the integrity and expertise of the fact-finding mission in carrying out its crucial investigative work. I should also like to express my concern that, yet again, we are confronted with a conclusion of the likely use of chemical weapons.

The use of chemical weapons, by any party to the conflict, is a war crime. It is an act prohibited by international law and has no justification under any circumstances. As such, no use of chemical weapons can be allowed to go unaddressed. I once again call upon members of the Security Council to ensure that an independent, professional and objective mechanism is dedicated to identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

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Annex

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

I have the honour to transmit to you my report entitled "Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme", prepared in accordance with the relevant provisions of Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Executive Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), both dated 27 September 2013, for transmission to the Security Council (see enclosure). My report covers the period from 24 April to 23 May 2018 and also covers the reporting requirements of Executive Council decision EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013.

(*Signed*) Ahmet **Üzümcü**

Enclosure

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

Note by the Director General

Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme

Background

1. In accordance with subparagraph 2(f) of the decision by the Executive Council (hereinafter "the Council") at its Thirty-Third Meeting (EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013), the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") is to report to the Council on a monthly basis regarding the implementation of that decision. In accordance with paragraph 12 of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), the report by the Secretariat is also to be submitted to the Security Council through the Secretary-General.

2. The Council, at its Thirty-Fourth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled "Detailed Requirements for the Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons and Syrian Chemical Weapons Production Facilities" (EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013). In paragraph 22 of that decision, the Council decided that the Secretariat should report on its implementation "in conjunction with its reporting required by subparagraph 2(f) of Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1".

3. The Council, at its Forty-Eighth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled "Reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria" (EC-M-48/DEC.1, dated 4 February 2015) noting the Director-General's intent to include reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria, along with information on the Council's discussion thereof, as part of the monthly reporting pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). Similarly, the Council, at its Eighty-First Session, adopted a decision entitled "Report by the Director-General Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-81/DEC.4, dated 23 March 2016), noting the Director-General's intent to provide information on the implementation of that decision.

4. The Council, at its Eighty-Third Session, adopted a decision entitled "OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism Reports on Chemical Weapons Use in the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-83/DEC.5, dated 11 November 2016). In subparagraph 12(a) of that decision, the Council decided that the Director-General shall "regularly inform the Council on the implementation of this decision and incorporate information regarding the implementation of this decision into his monthly reporting to the United Nations Security Council, through the United Nations Secretary-General, regarding EC-M-33/DEC.1".

5. This, the fifty-sixth monthly report, is therefore submitted in accordance with the aforementioned Council decisions and includes information relevant to the period from 24 April 2018 to 23 May 2018.

Progress achieved by the Syrian Arab Republic in meeting the requirements of Executive Council decisions EC-M-33/DEC.1 and EC-M-34/DEC.1

6. Progress by the Syrian Arab Republic is as follows:

(a) The Secretariat has verified the destruction of 25 of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. As previously reported, in November 2017 the Secretariat conducted an initial inspection

of the last two stationary above-ground facilities in accordance with paragraph 44 of Part V of the Verification Annex to the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention"). Thanks to the voluntary contributions provided by States Parties to the Syria Trust Fund for the Destruction of Chemical Weapons, including contributions provided in response to the Secretariat's Note S/1541/2017 (dated 9 October 2017), the Secretariat, together with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), has been making all the required arrangements to assist the Syrian Arab Republic in the destruction of the facilities located at these two sites. The remaining required arrangements are expected to be finalised in the coming weeks. Once the arrangements are in place, destruction operations are expected to take two to three months, subject to security conditions.

(b) On 17 May 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to the Council its fifty-fourth monthly report (EC-88/P/NAT.3, dated 17 May 2018) regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its CWPFs, as required by paragraph 19 of EC-M-34/DEC.1.

Progress in the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons by States Parties hosting destruction activities

7. As stated in previous reports, all of the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have now been destroyed.

Activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to Executive Council decisions EC-81/DEC.4 and EC-83/DEC.5

8. During the reporting period, the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continued its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with paragraph 3 of Council decision EC-81/DEC.4 and paragraph 6 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5.

9. As reported previously, in a letter to Deputy Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Dr Faisal Mekdad, dated 10 April 2018, the Director-General referred to his report entitled "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (EC-87/HP/DG.1, dated 2 March 2018) and reiterated that unanswered questions remain that require a response. An updated non-exhaustive list of questions, including follow-up questions arising from the answers provided by the Syrian Arab Republic in a note verbale dated 19 February 2018, was attached to the Director-General's letter.

10. The Director-General also repeated his request to the Syrian authorities to provide all necessary information that would assist in clarifying the remaining issues associated with the declarations and further submissions of the Syrian Arab Republic. Additionally, the Director-General restated that the Secretariat will continue to assist the Syrian Arab Republic in resolving these issues in a manner consistent with the Convention and relevant Council decisions. The Secretariat has not received a response from the Syrian Arab Republic to the Director-General's letter dated 10 April 2018.

Other activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to the Syrian Arab Republic

11. UNOPS continues to provide support to the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement.

12. As at the cut-off date of this report, one OPCW staff member was deployed as part of the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Supplementary resources

13. As previously reported, the Trust Fund for Syria Missions was established in November 2015 to support the OPCW FFM and other remaining activities, such as those of the DAT. As at the cut-off date of this report, total contributions to this fund stood at EUR 17.1 million. Contribution agreements had been concluded with Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Monaco, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and the European Union.

Activities carried out with respect to the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria

14. Guided by Council decisions EC-M-48/DEC.1 and EC-M-50/DEC.1 (dated 23 November 2015), as well as by United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015), the FFM continued to study all available information relating to the allegations of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. During the reporting period, the FFM team continued its deployment to the Syrian Arab Republic with regard to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Douma on 7 April 2018. The team visited relevant sites, collected samples, and conducted interviews.

16. On 15 May, the Secretariat issued a Note entitled, "Report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria Regarding an Alleged Incident in Saraqib, Syrian Arab Republic on 4 February 2018" (S/1626/2018). The report shares the findings by the FFM that chlorine was likely used as a chemical weapon in Saraqib on 4 February 2018.

Conclusion

17. The main focus of the future activities of the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic will be on the activities of the FFM and on the implementation of Council decisions EC-83/DEC.5 and EC-81/DEC.4, including declaration-related issues, as well as on the verification of the destruction of the two stationary above-ground facilities, and annual inspections of the underground structures already verified as destroyed.

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Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith the concept note for the Security Council debate on the theme "Maintenance of international peace and security: comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa", to be held on 25 June 2018 in the Security Council, under the presidency of the Russian Federation (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Vassily **Nebenzia**

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Annex to the letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council debate on the theme "Maintenance of international peace and security: comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa"

I. Introduction

1. The Russian Federation proposes holding on 25 June 2018 a Security Council debate on the theme "Maintaining international peace and security: comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa" with the aim of considering the root causes of the conflicts in the Middle East from a wider perspective and examining ways to tackle those root causes jointly.

II. Situational context

2. Conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa have had a profound destabilizing impact not only on the military and political situation in the region, but also on international relations in general. Old crises are still present while new ones are proliferating. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to be at the core of the turbulence that has swept the region. Its optimal settlement will be through a two-State solution on the basis of relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the Arab Peace Initiative. The intermediary role of the Middle East Quartet, as an institution endorsed in Security Council resolutions, remains unique. Wars in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen await resolution. Additional international efforts are needed to rectify the situation in Libya and to help to restore Iraq. The escalation of tensions around the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region does not contribute to improving the overall situation. These conflicts and problems have led to the spread of terrorists, who are resorting to weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical agents. They have also led to the intensification of illegal arms trafficking and an increase in the number of refugees. The presence of illegal armed groups in hotspots has become a widespread reality.

3. The ethnic and religious balance that existed for centuries has been deeply disturbed. This concerns not only thousands of Christians who have been forced to leave the Middle East, but also Kurds, especially the Yazidi Kurds, and other ethnic and religious minorities. Moreover, as a result of conflict, many representatives of the largest Sunni community in the region have felt unprotected.

4. The settlement of conflicts is hindered by the fact that unilateral actions, often not backed by any legitimate reasons, are coming to the forefront. They undermine confidence between States and damage the reputation of the United Nations and the Security Council.

5. All these factors pose a threat to international peace and security, inter-civilizational dialogue, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and, therefore, require an urgent response. Of course, the response must be provided on a strictly legal basis and within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations. Actions to circumvent international law only strengthen the sources of conflict and undermine prospects for the advancement of political processes, acting as a time bomb for the future unity, territorial integrity and independence of States.

III. Objectives

6. To prepare responses to threats to international peace and security, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the nature of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. It must be acknowledged that attempts to deal with conflicts separately, without taking into account the common regional and historical context, are useless. The results of ignoring that fact are known. Modern reality dictates the need for a comprehensive approach and the development of unified rules of the game for external players.

7. A wider look at the problems in the region could help to highlight the main factors that characterize the present situation in the Middle East and North Africa, and to identify the additional risks to peace efforts posed by interference in the internal affairs of States, the use of force in violation of international law and that bypasses the Security Council, and the supply of weapons to non-State groups and groups that adhere to radical ideologies. It is important to reaffirm the commitment to the supremacy of international law and the rejection of military approaches to resolving crises.

8. Understanding the root causes of the spiral of instability in the region will make it possible to maintain necessary focus on genuinely collective work, in which the Security Council should have a key role.

9. Only consistent and collective efforts on the part of the international community, on the basis of respect for the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and the rejection of double standards, can bring us closer to the desired normalization of the situation in the region. Any unilateral action is detrimental. What is really needed are coordinated approaches that are sealed by decisions of the Security Council. Cooperation should rest upon respect for the cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world and the democratization of international relations.

10. The logic of mutually respectful and constructive collective work inevitably leads to the need to develop a common, unifying, non-confrontational agenda for the Security Council. Its elements could include the following actions:

(a) The formation of a genuinely global front against terrorism and all its manifestations, with an emphasis on supporting the legitimate Governments of States that are combating terrorism on their territory.

(b) The refusal to resolve conflicts by force and the intensification of peace efforts, including through support for the good offices of the Secretary-General, regional organizations and Member States with respect to various Middle Eastern issues. This has particular relevance to the long-standing stalemate in Palestinian-Israeli affairs, which plays a powerful role in fuelling radical sentiments. Progress on this track would serve as an important contribution to ensuring regional stability and security for those who live in the region.

(c) The provision of targeted assistance for the preservation and development of strong, stable and capable State institutions, including security structures.

(d) A review of the sanctions policy of the Security Council, along with the rejection of unilateral sanctions and embargoes, which usually become an instrument of collective punishment and an obstacle in the way of achieving peace.

(e) The strengthening of existing measures and the development of new measures that help to build confidence in the triangle comprising Arab States, Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran. An initiative to launch a regional dialogue with the participation of external players, similar to the Helsinki Process that took place in

Europe in the 1970s, should be considered. The Arab Peace Initiative and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme retain constructive potential.

(f) The concentration of international efforts on combating chemical terrorism without politicization and on the basis of objectivity, impartiality and professionalism, which, inter alia, implies the improvement of the international legal framework for countering terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction.

(g) The promotion of an interfaith and inter-ethnic culture of peace at the national, regional and international levels, including the protection of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as of places and objects of cultural and religious significance.

(h) The refusal to politicize humanitarian work. Efforts to address problems relating to internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants, the restoration of infrastructure, and the provision of assistance to the States of the region should not be selective.

(i) The promotion of the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction.

11. An honest and unbiased partnership with respect to all the above-mentioned areas would help to contain destabilizing tendencies in the Middle East and North Africa and throughout the world, leaving dialogue as the only tool for resolving disagreements.

IV. Guiding questions

12. The following questions are proposed for discussion:

(a) What factors generate the potential for conflict in the Middle East and North Africa?

(b) Why does the policy of taking unilateral steps prevail over measures of a collective nature approved by the United Nations?

(c) How can the inviolability of the key principles of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unity of States be further protected? How can the extralegal designation of "regimes that need to be changed" be prevented?

(d) On what basis would it be possible to jointly continue the process of reinforcing established collective security mechanisms and developing new regional systems on the basis of the principle of the commonality and indivisibility of security?

(e) What is needed to truly unite the efforts of all States in the fight against the threat of terrorism, including the use of chemical weapons by terrorists? What additional measures need to be taken to fight the financing of terrorism and to undercut the efforts of terrorists to spread their ideologies?

(f) Why has the tendency towards division become so profound in communities where peoples of diverse ethnical and religious backgrounds had coexisted peacefully for centuries? How does this threaten the future of the region?

(g) What needs to be done to prevent the shift in the nature of conflict in the region from being based in politics to being based in religion? What is needed to provide for the safety of religious and ethnical minorities?

V. Expected results

13. The Russian Federation expects an open and unbiased dialogue on the above-mentioned questions, which will allow participants to reach common ground with respect to the development of collective approaches to the settlement of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa.